

NATURE AS TEACHER OR REFUGE



Dharma Rain

LOTUS SUTRA

AT THAT TIME THE WORLD-HONORED ONE spoke in verse form, saying:

The Dharma King, destroyer of being,
when he appears in the world
accords with the desires of living beings,
preaching the Law in a variety of ways.
The Thus Come One, worthy of honor and reverence,
is profound and far-reaching in wisdom.
For long he remained silent regarding the essential,
in no hurry to speak of it at once.
If those who are wise hear of it
they can believe and understand it,
but those without wisdom will have doubts and regrets
and for all time will remain in error.
For this reason,
he adjusts to the person's power when preaching,

The *Lotus Sutra* (*Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma*), a widely influential Mahayana scripture, expounds seminal Buddhist teachings. Probably composed in the early third century CE, it is best known in a Chinese version produced in 406. Translation by Burton Watson.

taking advantage of various causes
 and enabling the person to gain a correct view.
 You should understand
 that it is like a great cloud
 that rises up in the world
 and covers it all over.
 This beneficent cloud is laden with moisture;
 the lightning gleams and flashes,
 and the sound of thunder reverberates afar,
 causing the multitude to rejoice.
 The sun's rays are veiled and hidden,
 a clear coolness comes over the land;
 masses of darkness descend and spread—
 you can almost touch them.
 The rain falls everywhere,
 coming down on all four sides.
 Its flow and saturation are measureless,
 reaching to every area of the earth,
 to the ravines and valleys of the mountains and streams,
 to the remote and secluded places where grow
 plants, bushes, medicinal herbs,
 trees large and small,
 a hundred grains, rice seedlings,
 sugar cane, grape vines.
 The rain moistens them all,
 none fails to receive its full share.
 The parched ground is everywhere watered,
 herbs and trees alike grow lush.
 What falls from the cloud
 is water of a single flavor,
 but the plants and trees, thickets and groves,
 each accept the moisture that is appropriate to its portion.
 All the various trees,
 whether superior, middling, or inferior,
 take what is fitting for large or small,
 and each is enabled to sprout and grow.

Root, stem, limb, leaf,
 the glow and hue of flower and fruit—
 one rain extends to them
 and all are able to become fresh and glossy.
 Whether their allotment
 of substance, form, and nature is large or small,
 the moistening they receive is one,
 but each grows and flourishes in its own way.
 The Buddha is like this
 when he appears in the world,
 comparable to a great cloud
 that covers all things everywhere.
 Having appeared in the world,
 for the sake of living beings
 he makes distinctions in expounding
 the truth regarding phenomena.
 The great sage, the World-Honored One,
 to heavenly and human beings,
 in the midst of all beings,
 pronounces these words:
 I am the Thus Come One,
 most honored of two-legged beings.
 I appear in the world
 like a great cloud
 that showers moisture upon
 all the dry and withered living beings,
 so that all are able to escape suffering,
 gain the joy of peace and security,
 the joys of this world
 and the joy of nirvana.
 All you heavenly and human beings of this assembly,
 listen carefully and with one mind!
 All of you should gather around
 and observe the one of unexcelled honor.
 I am the World-Honored One,
 none can rival me.

In order to bring peace and security to living beings
 I have appeared in the world
 and for the sake of this great assembly
 I preach the sweet dew of the pure Law.
 This Law is of a single flavor,
 that of emancipation, nirvana.
 With a single wonderful sound
 I expound and unfold its meaning;
 constantly for the sake of the Great Vehicle
 I create causes and conditions.
 I look upon all things
 as being universally equal,
 I have no mind to favor this or that,
 to love one or hate another.
 I am without greed or attachment
 and without limitation or hindrance.
 At all times, for all things
 I preach the Law equally;
 as I would for a single person,
 that same way I do for numerous persons.
 Constantly I expound and preach the Law,
 never have I done anything else,
 coming, going, sitting, standing,
 never to the end growing weary or disheartened.
 I bring fullness and satisfaction to the world,
 like a rain that spreads its moisture everywhere.
 Eminent and lowly, superior and inferior,
 observers of precepts, violators of precepts,
 those fully endowed with proper demeanor,
 those not fully endowed,
 those of correct views, of erroneous views,
 of keen capacity, of dull capacity—
 I cause the Dharma rain to rain on all equally,
 never lax or neglectful.
 When all the various living beings
 hear my Law,

they receive it according to their power,
 dwelling in their different environments.
 Some inhabit the realm of human and heavenly beings,
 of wheel-turning sage kings,
 Shakra, Brahma and the other kings—
 these are the inferior medicinal herbs.
 Some understand the Law of no outflows,
 are able to attain nirvana,
 to acquire the six transcendental powers
 and gain in particular the three understandings,
 or live alone in mountain forests,
 constantly practicing meditation
 and gaining the enlightenment of pratyekabuddhas—
 these are the middling medicinal herbs.
 Still others seek the place of the World-Honored One,
 convinced that they can become Buddhas,
 putting forth diligent effort and practicing meditation—
 these are the superior medicinal herbs.
 Again there are sons of the Buddha
 who devote their minds solely to the Buddha way,
 constantly practicing mercy and compassion,
 knowing that they themselves will attain Buddhahood,
 certain of it and never doubting—
 these I call the small trees.
 Those who abide in peace in their transcendental powers,
 turning the wheel of non-regression,
 saving innumerable millions
 of hundreds of thousands of living beings—
 bodhisattvas such as these
 I call the large trees.
 The equality of the Buddha's preaching
 is like a rain of a single flavor,
 but depending upon the nature of the living being,
 the way in which it is received is not uniform,
 just as the various plants and trees
 each receive the moisture in a different manner.

The Buddha employs this parable
 As an expedient means to open up and reveal the matter,
 using various kinds of words and phrases
 and expounding the single Law,
 but in terms of the Buddha wisdom
 this is no more than one drop of the ocean.
 I rain down the Dharma rain,
 filling the whole world,
 and this single-flavored Dharma
 is practiced by each according to the individual's power.
 It is like those thickets and groves,
 medicinal herbs and trees
 which, according to whether they are large or small,
 bit by bit grow lush and beautiful.
 The Law of the Buddhas
 is constantly of a single flavor,
 causing the many worlds
 to attain full satisfaction everywhere;
 by practicing gradually and stage by stage,
 all beings can gain the fruits of the way.

One Truth, Countless Teachings

HUA-YEN SUTRA

THEN MANJUSHRI ASKED CHIEF OF THE VIRTUOUS,
 “Since that which the Buddhas realize is but one truth, how is it
 that they expound countless teachings, manifest countless lands, edify
 countless beings, speak in countless languages, appear in countless bodies,
 know countless minds, demonstrate countless mystic powers, are able to
 shake countless worlds, display countless extraordinary adornments, re-
 veal boundless different realms of objects, whereas in the essential nature
 of things these different characteristics cannot be found at all?” Chief of
 the Virtuous answered in verse:

The meaning of what you ask
 Is deep and hard to fathom.
 The wise are able to know it,
 Always delighting in Buddha's virtues.

Just as the nature of earth is one
 While beings each live separately,
 And the earth has no thought of oneness or difference,
 So is the truth of all Buddhas.

Just as the nature of fire is one,
 While able to burn all things
 And the flames make no distinction,
 So is the truth of all Buddhas.

Just as the ocean is one
 With millions of different waves,

The *Hua-yen (Flower Ornament) Sutra* is a vast and prominent Mahayana scripture. Its teachings form the basis of Hua-yen, a principal school of Buddhism in China. The first comprehensive Chinese version was completed in 420 CE. Translation by Thomas Cleary.

Yet the water is no different:
So is the truth of all Buddhas.

And as the nature of wind is one
While able to blow on all things,
And wind has no thought of oneness or difference:
So is the truth of all Buddhas.

Also like great thunderheads
Raining all over the earth,
The raindrops make no distinctions:
So is the truth of all Buddhas.

Just as the element earth, while one,
Can produce various sprouts,
Yet it's not that the earth is diverse:
So is the truth of all Buddhas.

Just as the sun without clouds overcast
Shines throughout the ten directions,
Its light beams having no difference:
So is the truth of all Buddhas.

And just as the moon in the sky
Is seen by all in the world
Yet the moon doesn't go to them:
So is the truth of all Buddhas.

Just as the king of the gods
Appears throughout the universe
Yet his body has no change:
So is the truth of all Buddhas.

Then Manjushri asked the bodhisattva Chief in Vision, "Buddhas as fields of blessings are one and the same to all—how is it that when sentient beings give alms to them, the resulting rewards are not the same—various forms, various families, various faculties, various property, various masters, various followers, various official positions, various virtuous qualities, various kinds of knowledge—and yet the Buddhas are impartial

toward them, not thinking of them as different?" Chief in Vision answered in verse:

Just as the earth is one
Yet produces sprouts according to the seeds
Without partiality toward any of them,
So is the Buddhas' field of blessings.

And just as water is uniform
Yet differs in shape according to the vessel,
So is the Buddhas' field of blessings:
It differs only due to beings' minds.

And just as a skilled magician
Can make people happy,
So can the Buddhas' field of blessings
Cause sentient beings joy.

As a king with wealth and knowledge
Can bring gladness to the masses,
So can the Buddhas' field of blessings
Bring peace and happiness to all.

Like a clear mirror
Reflecting images according to the forms,
So from the Buddhas' field of blessings
Rewards are obtained according to one's heart.

Like a panacea
Which can cure all poisoning,
So does the Buddhas' field of blessings
Annihilate all afflictions.

And just as when the sun comes up
It illuminates the world,
Thus does the Buddhas' field of blessings
Clear away all darkness.

Like the clear full moon
Shining over the earth,

So is the Buddhas' field of blessings
Equal in all places.

Just as a great conflagration
Can burn up all things,
So does the Buddhas' field of blessings
Burn up all fabrication.

Just as a violent wind
Can cause the earth to tremble,
So does the Buddhas' field of blessings
Move all living beings.

At Home in the Mountains

MAHAKASHYAPA

Strung with garlands of flowering vines,
This patch of earth delights the mind;
The lovely calls of elephants sound—
These rocky crags do please me so!

The shimmering hue of darkening clouds,
Cool waters in pure streams flowing;
Enveloped by Indra's ladybugs—
These rocky crags do please me so!

Like the lofty peaks of looming clouds,
Like the most refined of palaces;
The lovely calls of tuskers sound—
These rocky crags do please me so!

The lovely ground is rained upon,
The hills are full of holy seers;
Resounding with the cry of peacocks—
These rocky crags do please me so!

Being clothed in flaxen flowers,
As the sky is covered in clouds;
Strewn with flocks of various birds—
These rocky crags do please me so!

Not occupied by village folk,
But visited by herds of deer;
Strewn with flocks of various birds—
These rocky crags do please me so!

With clear waters and broad boulders,
Holding troops of monkey and deer;
Covered with moist carpets of moss—
These rocky crags do please me so!

But there is not so much contentment
For me in the five-fold music,
As in truly seeing Dharma
With a well-concentrated mind.

Mahakashyapa, a principal disciple of the Buddha, was noted for his ascetic self-discipline. It is said that when the Buddha silently held up a flower, only Mahakashyapa smiled in comprehension. He was later recognized as the first Indian patriarch of Zen. Translation by Andrew Olendzki.

Cold Mountain Poems

HAN-SHAN

1

I climb the road to Cold Mountain,
The road to Cold Mountain that never ends.
The valleys are long and strewn with stones;
The streams broad and banked with thick grass.
Moss is slippery, though no rain has fallen;
Pines sigh, but it isn't the wind.
Who can break from the snares of the world
And sit with me among the white clouds?

2

As for me, I delight in the everyday Way,
Among mist-wrapped vines and rocky caves.
Here in the wilderness I am completely free,
With my friends, the white clouds, idling forever.
There are roads, but they do not reach the world;
Since I am mindless, who can rouse my thoughts?
On a bed of stone I sit, alone in the night,
While the round moon climbs up Cold Mountain.

3

If you sit in silence and never speak,
What stories will you leave for the young people to tell?
If you live shut away in a forest thicket,
How can the sun of wisdom shine out?
No dried-up carcass can be the guardian of the Way.

Han-shan, a poet and Buddhist layman, lived in China during the late eighth or early ninth century. After withdrawing to Cold Mountain (Han-shan), he is said to have scrawled his poems on cliffs and trees. Translation by Burton Watson.

Wind and frost bring sickness and early death.
Plow with a clay ox in a field of stone
And you will never see the harvest day!

4

Yesterday I saw the trees by the river's edge,
Wrecked and broken beyond belief,
Only two or three trunks left standing,
Scarred by blades of a thousand axes.
Frost strips the yellowing leaves,
River waves pluck at withered roots.
This is the way the living must fare.
Why curse at Heaven and Earth?

5

Living in the mountains, mind ill at ease,
All I do is grieve at the passing years.
At great labor I gathered the herbs of long life,
But has all my striving made me an immortal?
Broad is my garden and wrapped now in clouds,
But the woods are bright and the moon is full.
What am I doing here? Why don't I go home?
I am bound by the spell of the cinnamon trees!

6

Here is a tree older than the forest itself;
The years of its life defy reckoning.
Its roots have seen the upheavals of hill and valley,
Its leaves have known the changes of wind and frost.
The world laughs at its shoddy exterior
And cares nothing for the fine grain of the wood inside.
Stripped free of flesh and hide,
All that remains is the core of truth.

Haiku in the Rain

BASHO, BUSON, SHIKI

A lightning flash—
the sound of water drops
falling through bamboo

—Buson



Sweet springtime showers
and no words can express
how sad it all is

—Buson



Rain falls on the grass,
filling the ruts left by
the festival cart

—Buson



The thunderstorm breaks up,
one tree lit by setting sun,
a cicada cry

—Shiki



Basho (1644–1694), widely regarded as Japan's finest poet, elevated haiku to new levels of expression. Buson (1716–1783) was a noted painter as well as a haiku master. Shiki (1867–1902) was a skilled practitioner of *tanka*, a thirty-one-syllable verse form. Translation by Sam Hamill.

The clouds come and go,
providing a rest for all
the moon viewers

—Basho



The camellia tips,
the remains of last night's rain
splashing out

—Buson